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ABSTRACT

Alternatives for revitalizing the programs and management of student services in community colleges are reviewed in this paper. First, alternatives related to student services programs are considered, including: (1) the increased use of computer-assisted counseling to integrate student services more fully with mainstream academic activities; (2) the possibility of developing and operating certain programs in an entrepreneurial fashion by, for example, providing human development and counseling programs to business and government agencies on a contract basis; (3) the option of cutting services to a minimum to deal with severe budget cuts; and (4) the establishment of campus-wide staff development programs based on clear institutional priorities and having financial and administrative support. The next section offers three alternatives for management development in the student services area. These involve the development of matrix models of responsibility and accountability to strengthen relations between the academic and student services areas; job rotation to provide staff with a more comprehensive perspective on college needs and and resources; and the development of quality circles where employees meet regularly to analyze problems and recommend solutions for management consideration. (HB)

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TOWARD A NEW ERA: ALTERNATIVES FOR REVITALIZING STUDENT SERVICES PROGRAMS

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TOWARD A NEW ERA:
ALTERNATIVES FOR REVITALIZING
STUDENT SERVICES PROGRAMS

William L. Deegan

Student services program administrators in community colleges face an uncertain future. They must confront the challenges of responding to the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, the potential of significant reductions in resources, and the diffusion of what was a rationale for the function. Throughout the history of community colleges, student services, or student personnel services as they are often called, have generally faced something of an identity crisis about their role and contributions. The profession has been buffeted in a number of ways throughout its evolution. For most of this century, student services were based on the concept of "in loco parentis", with staff serving as friendly counselors and authority figures. The student protest movement of the 1960's and the increased diversity in students age ranges and attendance patterns changed all that.

The 1970's saw the profession search for a new conceptual basis and we began to hear more about "student development"--a concept that remains vague, undefined in practice and largely unimplemented in community colleges.

Coupled with the problems of role and identity were the fiscal crises which struck so many colleges in the 1970's and which are predicted to continue for the decade ahead. The combination of these problems frequently led to a downgrading or even elimination of many student services functions. As Humphries wrote:

> Fiscal pressures produced and continue to produce casualties.

> Some institutions, in drastic economy moves, have eliminated student personnel divisions; others have imposed substantial staff reductions. A few institutions are experimenting with organizational patterns that place all student personnel functions in the hands of the faculty as they were previously. Student services have been reduced in many areas, although the administrative responsibility for such services has not been relinquished. (1977)

Despite calls throughout the past decade for a redefinition and development of student services, Elsner and Ames (1983) summed up the current status of the field as follows:

> No genuine consensus exists about the nature of, need for, or direction of community college student service programs. A model for change seems to elude most leaders... Leaders of community colleges and student service staffs agree on one point: Student services need to be redesigned. The student service function needs an infusion of new ideas, new approaches, and a new reason for being (p.139).

Given the continuing problems of unclear mission and financial vulnerability, the objective of this article is to present a review and synthesis of major alternatives for revitalizing the programs and the management of student services in community colleges. While no single alternative will meet the needs of all community colleges, the alternatives can serve as a useful focus for analysis as student services administrators consider future directions.

PROGRAM ALTERNATIVES

1. Student Services As Computer Assisted Counseling

A major problem is that student services programs have rarely been integrated with the mainstream academic activities in community colleges. Many services, such as student activities programs, tend to be peripheral and of interest only to small constituency groups. One alternative for better integrating academic and student services programs and for serving larger numbers of students in a meaningful way is the "Response System With

Variable Prescriptions" (RSVP) model used at Miami-Dade Community College. This is a computer-based instructional management system that utilizes the computer's capabilities to develop programs for student services and individualized instruction. (See Elsner and Ames, 1983). Primary components of the system include:

- an academic alert and advisement system which alerts both faculty and students about student progress at midterm
- an interactive information system to assist students in personal self-assessment
- a student services information profile which provides information about students to faculty who will teach them

Personal counseling and academic advising are high priorities with students (see Cross, 1981). While the RSVP model is still developing, its potential to use computers and other technology to improve the counseling and advisement of the large and diverse student population found in community colleges seems to hold great promise as a major strategy for student service administrators to consider or modify as they determine priorities for the decade ahead.

2. Student Services As An Entrepreneurial Activity

A second alternative for student services programs, especially in view of the projected fiscal difficulties of the decade ahead, is to develop and operate certain programs in an entrepreneurial fashion. Richard Chait (1983) called for student services professionals to see themselves more as resource generators than resource allocators. In doing so, there may be a good fit between efforts to establish contract training programs with business and industry and a more entrepreneurial student services component. Student services staff could take leadership responsibility for providing certain kinds of development (i.e. human development, counseling) programs for business,

hospitals or government agencies on a contract basis, or they could coordinate with community services divisions in this effort. Programs could also be provided to the general public (i.e. counseling, placement, cultural, recreational) on a fee basis.

Engaging in this kind of activity would mean carefully setting priorities, reallocating some resources so this component can be implemented, and developing the kinds of business skills needed to market and deliver programs. To some, this concept may be anathema--a misallocation of student services resources. To others, it may be seen as a logical extension of important services to new clients. It could turn out that the two thrusts of student services --the campus based student services and the entrepreneurial based client services would stimulate mutual benefits, both in the development of better programs and in the generation of additional resources.

3. Student Services As The Provider Of Only Essential Functions

A third alternative, one that may result after severe budget cuts, is to consider cutting services to the minimum as is the case in many European colleges. Elsner and Ames (1983) suggest three categories of student services in community colleges:

- Institutionally Based - those essential to the functioning of the college, e.g. admissions
- Situationally Based - those which may be required because of special circumstances, e.g. child care
- Special Interest or Developmental Services - which provide assistance to special groups, e.g. support services for re-entering women

The argument could be made that many student services programs, especially those in the situationally based or special interest categories, could be handled in one of two ways: they could be discontinued or they could be divested (Chait 1983).

The decisions to discontinue certain functions would be made after a campus-wide review of needs, priorities and fiscal resources. Other functions might be divested to student groups (e.g. clubs or special services). These functions could be run by student interest groups as needed. In other cases (health care, some financial aid or some personal counseling) students could be referred to resources in the community where liaison relationships could be developed.

Many of the student services in England are run by students themselves. While the more transient student population found in community colleges would have a more difficult time maintaining continuity, the alternative does have the advantage of allowing colleges to concentrate limited resources on the essential functions (Institutionally Based) and leaves the Situationally Based and Special Interest Based services in the hands of other providers as demand dictates.

4. Student Services As The Student And Staff Development Center

An increasing body of literature throughout the 1970's called attention to the need for more effective organizational and staff development. The problems of "tenured-in" faculty, rapid changes in technology, and the increasingly diverse student population all demand institutional adaptations that can be greatly facilitated by an effective staff development program. Unfortunately, many staff development programs have been piecemeal, cosmetic and often unrelated to institutional or individual needs.

One of the problems of translating staff development theories into practice is the absence of any unit where responsibility for campus-wide needs assessment and program development is fixed. While many departments and units make efforts, staff development tends to remain a peripheral and ad-hoc activity. This strategy for student services programs would see the development of a second

thrust for student services--the responsibility for managing a campus-wide staff development program. Again, this alternative would require a firm setting of priorities, some reallocation of resources, and strong support from the president of the college.

Much of the training in human devopment and program management that student services professionals receive could readily apply to the development of this second thrust. While critics will point to a potential loss of emphasis on student programs, the setting of clear and limited priorities and responsibilities and the allocation of resources for this dual thrust could, as in the "Entrepreneurial Model", lead to benefits to both students and staff. Putting limited resources into priority needs in two important areas may be more useful to the college than scattering resources over a wide range of questionable priorities in only one area.

Community colleges will need to make more progress in organizational and staff development in the next decade than perhaps at any time in their history. Programs that lead to instititional, professional and personal development and that grow from the needs of the institution will be among the most important efforts of community college personnel. Assigning responsibility for this function to student services professionals, and critically examining functions that could be replaced to make room for this responsibility, could pay significant long-term dividends for the institution and could give student services a new importance through this dual thrust.

Obviously, none of the alternatives discussed are mutually exclusive and combinations of the alternatives can be created depending on college needs and resources. In the best case scenario, decisions would be based on institutional needs assessments, a clear sense of institutional mission and a strategic plan

for the college that includes the student services component. Too often, in the past, student services have been far removed from mainstream academic needs, and any decisions about a new concept of student services should be made in the context of the institution-wide student, academic and staff needs.

MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

In addition to considering alternatives for program development, there is a need to consider alternatives for management development in student services. While management development decisions will grow out of institutional needs assessments and program priorities, there is a growing awareness of the need for better integration of student services into mainstream campus activities. Several concepts from the American corporate world and from Japanese management theory may have special applicability for student services administration. (See Pascal and Athos, 1981, Deegan, 1982, Peters and Waterman, 1982, Deegan, 1984, and Ouchi, 1981). This section of the article will review three concepts which may be particularly relevant for community college student services administrators.

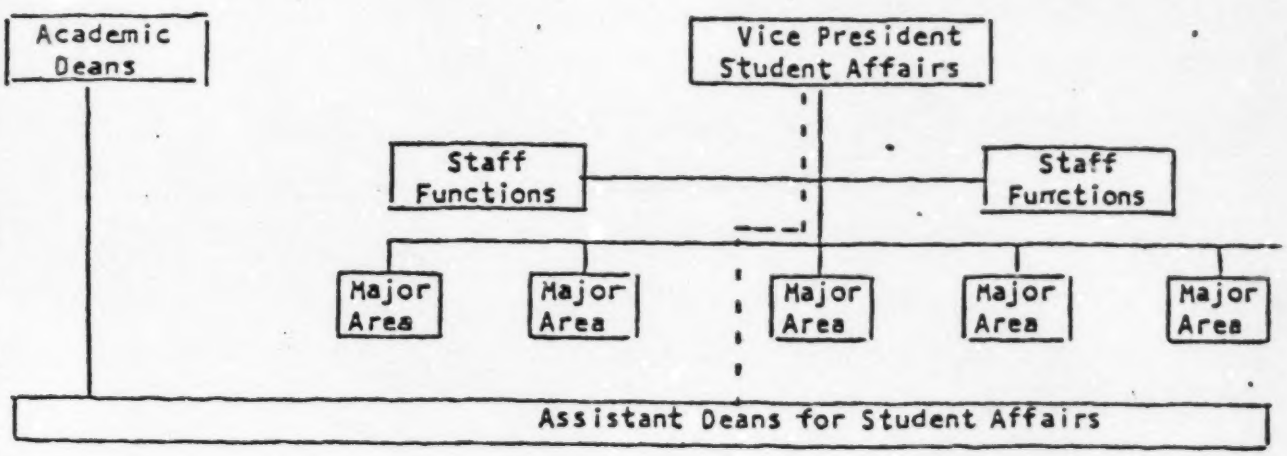
1. Matrix Organization

Matrix organization can provide a vehicle to enhance teamwork and productivity, and it can help integrate activities across divisional lines. The concept can also produce uncertainty about responsibilty, and conflict, unless it is implemented in an organizational culture where the goals of matrix organizations are clear, responsibilities are fixed, and where trust and cooperation are encouraged and rewarded.

Traditionally, student services have been organized in a line-staff structure. But for student services to really complement academic programs, there is a need for an organizational structure that links the two units more

effectively and that facilitates communication and program coordination. Matrix organization has the potential to do that, and two models might serve as a focus for analysis by campus administrators. Figure I shows the "Hub-Spoke" model which might be used where the primary goal is to enhance communication between academic affairs and student services units.

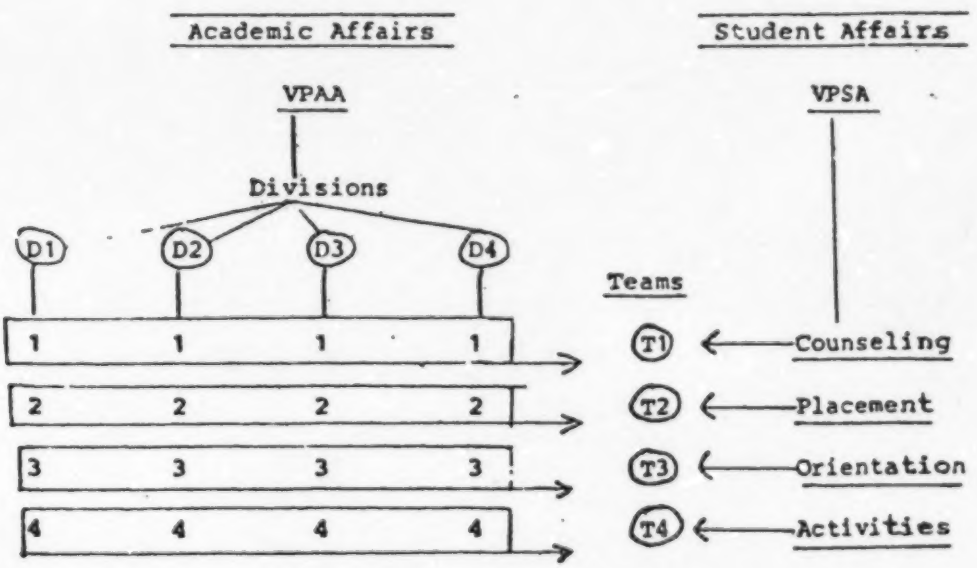
Figure I. The Hub-Spoke Model



In this model, each academic unit would designate a person responsible for liaison with student services. Those people would be designated as assistant deans for student affairs in their unit and would report regularly to the chief student affairs officer to enhance communication and coordinate programs. (See Appleton, Moore, and Vinton, 1978)

Another version of matrix organization for student affairs divisions might take a stronger project and team orientation. Figure 2 shows such a model.

Figure 2. Team Organization



In this model, each academic division would designate a person responsible for coordination of a particular project (e.g., counseling, orientation, placement, activities). That person would work with both the project (team) leader from student affairs and staff in his or her division to help coordinate the particular function. Depending on the campus climate, the functions could either be decentralized and offered in the academic division with the help of student affairs staff, or they could remain centralized but with better information and coordination provided by the divisional representatives on the teams. Obviously this decision must realistically take into account prevailing reward systems for faculty and administrators.

As discussed earlier, individual colleges will develop their own models based on their unique needs and reward systems. Hopefully, we will see more

experimentation with matrix organization to more fully assess its potential to provide more effective collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs staffs for the long term interests of the institution.

2. Job Rotation

An important component of Japanese management theory involves the concept of job rotation. In America we tend to develop a single job specialty and change organizations to succeed in our careers. In Japan people tend to learn many job specialties but remain in a single organization. One effect of this job rotation pattern in Japan is to enhance commitment and teamwork. Through rotation, staff members develop a more comprehensive perspective on the organization and can more easily communicate and participate in problem solving efforts that transcend a single specialty.

Job rotation in a student services unit might take one of three forms:

- rotation between units in student services
- rotation of staff to work in the vice president for student services office
- rotation/exchanges of student services staff with other units of the college such as academic affairs or computing operations

Implementation of this concept would require clear policies on duties, goals and financial arrangements (see Deegan, Steele and Thielen, 1984), but it may provide staff with a more comprehensive perspective on needs and resources of the college and it may enhance teamwork, productivity and a better integration of student services programs in mainstream campus activities. In addition, research suggests that "staff at all levels who continually face new jobs will be more vital, productive, and satisfied with their work than those who stay in one job, even though the changes in job do not include a promotion but are entirely lateral" (Ouchi, 1981, p. 32).

While the concept of job rotation may be somewhat foreign to many student services managers, the difficulties of the fiscal and employment conditions projected for the decade ahead may spur additional experimentation with job rotation as a vehicle to enrich the quality of work life and improve morale and productivity throughout the organization.

3. Quality Circles

A final management development concept is related to the "Entrepreneurial Model" for student services programs discussed earlier in this article. Quality circles involve small groups of employees doing similar work who voluntarily meet regularly using a structured group process to analyze problems and recommend solutions for management's consideration. Quality circles were begun in Japan in 1949. The impetus for the concept was the belief that industry's long standing separation of study and analysis from work routines was ineffective. Quality circles were proposed as a vehicle for unlocking the potential for worker contribution to the organization by providing mechanisms to help produce a sense of fuller participation and dignity in the organization.

Reports of results of quality circle programs in the profit sector have been generally positive and sometimes spectacular. In addition to improved morale, more effective teamwork, increased employee motivation, reduced errors and enhanced quality, studies have reported some significant cost savings. For example:

- The circle in a document control organization made recommendations resulting in changes in the flow of paperwork and reduction in the number of errors. The

employees increased job scope and responsibility. In addition to the improved level of quality and the enhancement of job satisfaction, a substantial $41,000 annual savings was realized (Dewar, 1979).

- Implementation of office work simplification procedures resulted in savings of $34,000 per year at another corporation (Dewar, 1979).

But perhaps the most important contribution of all is the treatment of the individual worker--the increased dignity, responsibility and sense of participation that can result from an effective quality circle program. While quality circles are no panacea for all problems, the concept has led to some significant results in the American and Japanese profit sectors.

The themes of quality and productivity are dominant ones in American society in the 1980's. Student services staffs could easily acquire the necessary training to take leadership responsibility on the campus for experimenting with quality circles in various units (which could eventually lead to significant cost savings), or they could take a more "entrepreneurial" stance and offer services to business, government and hospital organizations for a fee.

Many community colleges are establishing "productivity centers", and some student services staff could easily begin to coordinate with those centers (or take leadership responsibility) as part of a more entrepreneurial thrust.

IN CONCLUSION

The review of program and management alternatives in this article is intended to serve as a focus for discussion as community college staffs make their own decisions about the future of student services programs. The concepts

are not mutually exclusive nor are they offered as panaceas. Each alternative has potentials and risks. Hopefully we will see more experimentation and assessment of these alternatives as we seek to reconsider and develop the role of student services in community colleges in the decade ahead.

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